

Letter from Taizé

BIMONTHLY 3.50 FF

August - September 1988 / 4

pages 3 and 7

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Christ Jesus,
we all have a longing
for your presence.

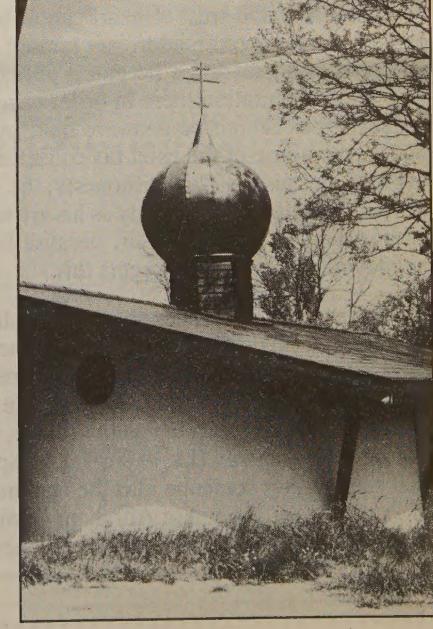
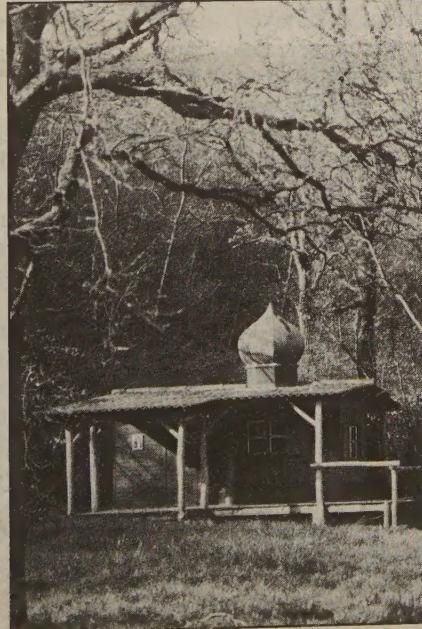
And so, in order to discern
the will of your love,
and nothing else,
we seek in silence
and in peace of heart,
to abandon ourselves to you
in all simplicity.

Happy are they who approach you
in trust of heart,
that wellspring of serene joy
and praise.

Property of
Graduate Theological Union

JUL 12 1988

PRAYER BY BROTHER ROGER



Madras
Intercontinental Meeting
27 - 31 December
Send in pre-registration
form before 31 July to receive
further information.

Paris
European Meeting
30 December - 4 January

Brother Roger has been to Russia in response to an invitation from the Patriarchate of Moscow to "take part in the celebrations dedicated to the one thousandth anniversary of the baptism of Russia that the Orthodox Church is holding from June 4th to 16th". This included the Council of the Orthodox Church at Zagorsk, and celebrations in Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad and Vladimir.

For this millennium, the book written by Mother Teresa and Brother Roger, "Mary, mother of reconciliations", has been published in Russian and Brother Roger has given some of the first copies to the Patriarchate.

It is also for the millennium that the three small chapels at Taizé shown in the photos were prepared: the chapel of the living spring, the brothers' hermitage and the chapel of St Basil. ■

Witnesses with Christ to the joyful news

The Gospel is the joyful news of a communion with God and between human beings. The first message in Scripture to be given the name of "good news" or "gospel" is the proclamation, during the time of Israel's exile, of God's return, together with his people, to Jerusalem. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news (i.e. gospel), who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Sion: Your God reigns!" (Is 52.7). The word gospel is born in the joy of renewed fellowship, in the happiness of God's presence who will once again make Jerusalem a place where people gather in joy. God will unite his people there. And then, renewing them in radiant beauty, he will prepare them to welcome the pilgrimage that will gather all the nations (cf. Is 2.1-5; 25.6-9; 60).

Conversion, openness of heart

Jesus resumes what he has to say in those words of the Gospel from Isaiah: "Believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1.15). In announcing the joyful news Christ kindles trust and conversion. He says, "Repent", but also, "Have trust, the Kingdom of God belongs to you."

Conversion is openness of heart. For the human heart closes up so easily on itself, on its past, on worry about the future, that openness is, in itself, that change that the Gospels also call conversion or repentance.

If, up until John the Baptist, conversion retained an element of anxiety in its expectation of forgiveness, with Christ it becomes a movement of serene trust. With him, repentance becomes a trust that God is present, and that through his Spirit he gives birth to kindness, forgiving love and joy.

As conversion and trust of heart can only be steps undertaken personally, Jesus often addresses himself to a person individually. For example, when he enters Jericho, he is prepared to give up his reputation there in order to meet one person, Zacchaeus. Jesus cannot be unaware that, by going to Zacchaeus' house, the house of the chief tax collector who is excluded and avoided because of his dishonesty, he will stir up opinion against himself just as strongly as his arrival had at first aroused enthusiasm (Lk 19.1-10). But, because he loves Zacchaeus as an individual person, he accepts this.

But the story of Zacchaeus shows more still: if Jesus is ready to give all for a single person to change his heart and trust in God's presence in their life, it is in order to re-establish him in the community of the people of God. He says to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham" (Lk 19.9). The Gospel is the word of God that reintegrates someone into the community, and that makes of Zacchaeus a true son of Abraham — worthy to be a member of the holy people of God.

The joyful news of community in Christ

Each person who heeds the Gospel finds themselves part of a community in Christ. Matthew, another tax collector, leaves his office at Christ's call and straightaway finds himself at table with him and his disciples and many others (Mt 9.9-13). This togetherness at table (which, in the culture of Palestine, reflects fellowship in life) stands out when we remember that, at that time, those who followed the letter of law exactly considered Jesus to be one of them, and happily invited him to their own tables (Lk 7.36; 11.37; 14.1). And now Jesus, a righteous man, instead of helping them draw the clear distinction between the good and the bad in order to preserve the holiness of God's people, enters unhesitatingly into community with sinners!

There lies the incredible part of the Gospel that they found difficult to grasp: the Word of Christ is a living word that really does heal and renew. Jesus does not compromise with anything that opposes God and the will of his love. But, by his Gospel, he gives what he asks for: a new heart that loves.

In order truly to gather the people of God, Jesus also announces the Gospel to those who already and observe the commandments. In the parable of the prodigal son, the elder son, who has always worked faithfully with his father, also receives a joyful message. The father tells him, "Everything I have is yours" (Lk 15.31).

The Gospel invites those who have been faithful to open their hearts to all people, and to love as God loves, without dividing or excluding. Jesus tells them, "Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy not sacrifice" (Mt 9.13). Whenever Christ proclaims the Gospel, the dawn of a vast communion appears. In one parable of the Kingdom, Jesus says that "the king's servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests" (Mt 22.10).

For all ages, the Gospel is, at the same time, the most personal word of all and the most effective leaven of community. For Zacchaeus' experience — touched as he was to the depths of his soul by Christ's unique and personal attention — to become that of our contemporaries, the whole Church, all of us, are called to become bearers of the Gospel.

For the Gospel, in order to bear its fruits of conversion, trust and joy, needs human faces to reflect Christ's love. It needs that kindness of heart that discovers in the person opposite a person who is unique and worth loving in themselves. And when a human being is touched by the Gospel, at the time of Christ as today, that person's heart is widened. The Gospel cannot fail to awaken a springtime of the Church and a trust across the earth, for, from the beginning, it is the joyful news of community in Christ.

Every morning in Taizé, a bible meditation introduces the day's reflection. The text on page 2 can be read to reflect upon the theme of forgiveness corresponding to the third part of the Letter from Ethiopia. Here are just the questions to begin discussion in a small group. An introduction on the Church linked with the fourth part of the letter follows. Next come a few ideas about the theme of sharing and human solidarity from one of the workshops.

"For those who dare to live a life of forgiveness"

- Where do I find the strength to forgive?
- How can I take part in the proclamation and practice of God's forgiveness?
- Where do I find the strength to forgive?

"The Risen One comes to wrest you away from loneliness"

When we are searching how to walk with Christ and to reply to his call: "Come, follow me", our greatest desire together with him is to love and to want that his Father's will of love be fulfilled. Since he loves us, he goes before us and opens a way for us so that our life finds its fulfilment with him.

Loving with Christ, uniting our life to his life – he makes this possible since he is living and present in the communion of the Church and offers forgiveness. It is in this communion, founded on the apostles, that he allows us to discover him in the breaking of bread and the proclamation of the Gospel. The first Christians had a very strong consciousness of the necessity of being one body. They are the continuity of Christ in history (Jn 13.20: "whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me..."). They are Christ's Body (1 Cor 12).

This communion receives its life at each moment from Christ himself: Jn 15.1-17 ("I am the vine and you are the branches").

Wanting to be in communion with those who live close by and who also want to follow Christ, and whom we haven't chosen, is a very strong expression of our trust in God. This communion can be lived more intensely in a small group, but, being rooted in God, it cannot be cut off from the rest of the believers. Saint Paul insists on this necessity: "Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were all called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all."

- With whom do I try to deepen a life of prayer and sharing?
- By which means can I participate in the building up of my local church? How can I take part in changes with a view to a deeper communion and greater solidarity?
- When I hear Christ's call: "Come, follow me," with whom do I try to live this out? Who can help me to understand this call?

*"Happy those who hunger
and thirst for justice."*

Throughout biblical tradition, two dimensions of the life of the believer are always intimately linked: a life of communion in the living God, and an attention to others, a respect for each person which becomes concrete in the search for justice.

Following this tradition, Jesus, proclaiming that the Kingdom is close at hand, renews this summary of the law: always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets (Mt 7:12). This dimension of the Gospel message is not just a liberal wisdom about life in society. A totally specific light illuminates the conscience, which knows its responsibility concerning justice and sharing.

Several centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that the one who "does not turn from his own kin" discovers a wellspring of life: "If you give your bread to the hungry and relief to the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness and your shadows become like the noon. The Lord will guide you, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never run dry" (Is 58.7-11).

From the first words of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus illuminates those who live in this ardent waiting with the same light and invites them to discover an unexpected joy. "Happy those who hunger and thirst for justice: they shall be satisfied... Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called childrens of God." (Mt 5.1-12).

Sharing means recognising that we have received from God and trusting in him who "feeds the birds in the sky and clothes the lilies of the fields". The Gospel doesn't give a recipe, but it confirms that this invitation is given without hesitation or reserve.

After the Resurrection, using the image of the shepherd, Christ gives to the apostles this mission of building communion between those entrusted to them. The good shepherd knows his sheep and leads them to a superabundance of life. He is also the one who, leaving everything, else behind sets off to seek out the one who is lost; he remains in solidarity even with those who are far off.

For whoever is attentive to the many emergencies near and faraway, it's clear that they are beyond our own possibilities. "For human beings, it is impossible, but for God everything is possible" (Mc 10.27).

In other words, it is possible not because of our own enthusiasm for a generous cause, or because of the efficiency of our plans and means, but because Christ himself sends and is present in the poor, in strangers and in prisoners (Mt 25.31-40).

- How have I discovered a joy in an attitude of sharing, a gesture which counted, a commitment which broke down barriers? Is my commitment a wellspring of joy?
- What has motivated me in a commitment for justice in my life?
- Faced with resistances and failures, great emergencies and needs, how can I draw from new energies in order to go forward and come through discouragement?
- As a young person or student, without work or funds, what could I share? How can I share my time? How can I share what I don't "possess": my gifts, my expectations, my hope, my trust?

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

several times, Christ comes the kingdom of heaven, which already begins on earth in the presence of God and the continual activity of his Spirit, to action of sowing, to a process of growing, to a harvest, while sowing and harvest are stages that can be observed, the long and essential period of growth cannot be seen. The eye does not discern a glance, in the apparent inactivity of a sown field, the continuous approach of an abundant harvest.

or the one who does see, I a question or doubt arises: is it that wherever God's spirit is at work there are also many incomprehensible and contradictory events? Jesus sowed the good seed of forgiveness, from where then do the arguments between those who bear his name come? Christ's Spirit lives in me, from where then does all that is unbearable in me come?

In the parable, it is an enemy the owner of the field who sows the weeds as an action of destruction, the reason for which we are not told. In the gospel, Christ and his mission are threatened from the very beginning: by the murderous anger of Herod who kills children unhesitatingly, then by the suggestions of the Tempter who tries to deflect Christ from trusting in God alone.

Threats to the life of God in us are not removed by precipitate action that tries to tear out all evil, but rather by trust, like that of the owner in the parable. He knows that nothing that is good will be lost, and that the rest, — the weeds that will already be dry and burnt before the gathering of the grain, — will no longer be thought of when the day of harvest-time comes.

Which events and situations have us disconcerted and asking: "So where have the weeds come from?" (v.27)?

Who is for me like the owner of the field in the parable, whose just calms worry and makes it possible to persevere patiently?

September

Meditating on the Word

1 Thu

Ep 4.30-5.2
Mt 9.18-34

We had all gone astray like sheep, everyone taking their own way, and the Lord has laid on his servant the faults of all of us. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. **Is 53.6-9**

2 Fri

Is 53.10-12
Ep 5.8-14

Jesus said to his disciples: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest. **Mt 9.35-38**

3 Sat

Is 54.1-6

Jesus said to Martha: You are worried and upset about many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. **Lk 10.38-42**

4 SUN

Is 35.4-7
Mk 7.31-37

God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him. **Jm 2.1-5**

5 Mon

Is 54.7-8,10
Mt 10.1-10

Let yourselves be filled by the Spirit. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. **Ep 5.15-20**

6 Tue

Is 54.11-14
Mt 10.11-20

Draw your strength from God's almighty power. Clothe yourself in the armour of God so that you can resist the tactics of the spirit of evil. **Ep 6.10-13**

7 Wed

Is 55.1-3
Ep 6.14-20

Jesus said to his disciples: Anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved. **Mt 10.22-27**

8 Thu

Is 55.6-9
1 P 1.1-5

Mary said: Being mindful of his faithful love, the Lord has come to the help of his servant, according to the promise he made to our ancestors. **Lk 1.46-56**

9 Fri

Is 55.10-13
Mt 10.28-32

Though you have not seen Christ Jesus, you love him. **1 P 1.6-12**

10 Sat

Is 56.1-7

Jesus said: If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple will certainly not lose his reward. **Mt 10.37-42**

11 SUN

Is 50.5-9
Mk 8.27-35

As a body without a spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds. **Jm 2.14-18,26**

12 Mon

1 P 1.13-16
Mt 11.1-6

The Lord says: My home is a high and holy place, but I am also with the humble and contrite to revive their spirit. **Is 57.14-19**

13 Tue

1 P 1.17-21
Mt 11.7-15

If your break unjust chains to let the oppressed go free, if you share your food with the hungry and shelter the homeless, then your light will break forth like the dawn, your wound will be quickly healed and the glory of the Lord will come behind you. **Is 58.5-8**

14 Wed

Is 58.9b-11
Mt 11.16-19,25-26

Love one another deeply, from the heart. **1 P 1.22-25**

15 Thu

Is 60.1-5
Mt 11.27-30

Come to Christ, the living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in God's sight. **1 P 2.1-6**

16 Fri

1 P 2.9-12
Mt 12.1-14

The Lord says to his people: No longer will violence be heard of in your land. You will call your gates "Praise". The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your glory. **Is 60.17b-20**

17 Sat

Is 61.1-3

Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: My servant will not quarrel or cry out, he will not snuff out the smouldering wick. All the nations will put their hope in him. **Mt 12.15-21**

18 SUN

Jm 3.13,16-18
Mk 9.30-37

Turn to the Lord who will pardon freely. For, thus says the Lord, my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways. **Is 55.6-9**

19 Mon

Is 61.10-11
Mt 12.22-30

Peter writes: There is merit in the sight of God if you put up with suffering you have not deserved. This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps. **1 P 2.19-25**

20 Tue

Is 62.1-5
Mt 12.33-42

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Instead, repay with a blessing, for to this you were called. **1 P 3.8-11**

21 Wed

Ep 4.1-13
Mt 12.46-50

St MATTHEW

As he walked, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me". And he got up and followed him. **Mt 9.9-13**

22 Thu

Is 62.10-12
Mt 13.1-9

If you suffer for what is right then you are blessed! Do not be frightened. Simply proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts. **1 P 3.13-17**

23 Fri

Is 65.17-25
1 P 3.18-22

Jesus said to his disciples: Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear! **Mt 13.10-11,16-17**

24 Sat

Mt 13.18-23

The Lord says: I am going to send peace to my people like a river. When you see this, your heart will rejoice. **Is 66.12-14a**

25 SUN

Nb 11.25-29
Mk 9.38-48

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but they shared everything they had. **Ac 4.32-35**

26 Mon

1 S 2.1-4 1 P 4.1-2,6
Mt 13.24-30

Guide me in your truth and teach me, Lord, for you are the God who saves me. **Ps 25**

27 Tue

1 S 3.1-9
Mt 13.31-35

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one speaking the very words of God; if anyone serves, let it be as one fulfilling God's service, so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ. **1 P 4.7-11**

28 Wed

1 S 16.1-12
1 P 4.12-14

Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; he hides it again, and in his joy sells everything he has and buys that field. **Mt 13.44-48,51-52**

29 Thu

2 S 7.1-16
Mt 13.53-58

Watch over those who are entrusted to you, not simply as a duty but willingly and with gladness of heart, according to God's will. **1 P 5.1-5**

30 Fri

2 S 22.1-4
Mt 14.13-21

Resist the tempter, standing firm in the faith, because you know that it is the same kind of suffering that the community of believers throughout the world is undergoing. **1 P 5.6-11**

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Meditating on the Word

October

Johannine hours

Mt 13.31-33

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day (if possible, two days in the same week) take a couple of hours to read the Bible passages with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

1 Sat Mt 14.22-36
The Lord rescued me from enemies who were stronger than I; he set me in the open.
2 S 22.17-20

2 SUN Gn 2.18-24
Heb 2.9-11
Jesus said: In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. **Mk 10.13-16**

3 Mon 2 S 22.28-31
Mt 15.21-31
Paul writes: Despite great suffering, you welcomed the Word of God with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and so you became a model for all believers. **1 Th 1.1-7**

4 Tue 1 Th 2.1-7a
Mt 16.1-12
You give me your shield of salvation, Lord, and listen to me always. You broaden the path beneath me. **2 S 22.31-37**

5 Wed 2 S 23.1-5
Mt 16.13-20
Paul writes: We give thanks to God because when you heard the Word you received it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, God's word, which is at work in you. **1 Th 2.7b-13**

6 Thu 1 K 8.22-30
1 Th 3.6-13
Jesus said: If anyone wants to follow me, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **Mt 16.21-28**

7 Fri 1 Th 4.1-12
Mt 17.1-13
Solomon prayed: Listen, Lord, forgive and act; deal with every person according to all they do, since you know their heart — you alone know the heart of everyone. **1 K 8.38-43**

8 Sat Mt 17.14-20
1 K 17.7-16
I cry out to you, Lord, set me free from prison that I may praise your name. **Ps 142**

9 SUN Ws 7.7-11
Mk 10.17-30
The word of God is alive and active. It discerns the thoughts and desires of the human heart. **Heb 4.12-13**

10 Mon 1 K 17.17-24
Mt 17.22-27
We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way God will gather to himself those who have fallen asleep in him. **1 Th 4.13-18**

11 Tue 1 K 19.3-8
Mt 18.1-5

You are children of light, children of the day. So let us not slumber but stay awake and sober.

1 Th 5.1-6

12 Wed 1 K 19.9-13a
Mt 18.10-14

See that people do not pay back evil for evil, but always seek what is good, both among yourselves and for others. **1 Th 5.9-15**

13 Thu 2 K 2.1-13
Mt 18.15-18

Be always joyful, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances. **1 Th 5.16-24**

14 Fri 2 K 4.42-44
2 Th 1.1-5

Jesus said: When two or three meet in my name, I am there among them. **Mt 18.19-22**

15 Sat 2 K 5.9-16

Jesus told a parable in which a king says to his servant: I cancelled all your debt because you begged me to. Shouldn't you then have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had on you? **Mt 18.23-35**

16 SUN Is 53.10-11
Heb 4.14-16

Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to save many. **Mk 10.35-45**

17 Mon 2 Th 1.11-2.3a
Mt 19.13-22

David prayed saying: Everything comes from you, our God, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are guests before you and passing visitors on this earth. **1 Ch 29.10,13-15a**

18 Tue 2 Tm 4.9-17a
Mt 19.23-26

St LUKE
Jesus said to his disciples: Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. **Lk 10.1-7**

19 Wed 1 Ch 29.17-18
Mt 19.27-30

God chose you from the beginning to be saved by faith in the truth and by the Spirit. **2 Th 2.13-17**

20 Thu 2 Th 3.1-5
Mt 20.1-16

Moses prayed to God saying: Remember your words to your people: "If you return to me and practise my commandments, then, even if you are dispersed to the farthest corners of the earth, I shall gather you and bring you back to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my name."

Ne 1.7-10

21 Fri Ne 8.3,8-10
Mt 20.17-23

Praised be God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. **2 Co 1.1-6**

22 Sat Ne 9.17-19

Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. **Mt 20.25-28**

23 SUN Heb 5.1-6
Mt 10.46-52

The Lord says: I will guide them to streams of water by a level path where they will not stumble, for I am a father to my people. **Jr 31.7-9**

24 Mon Qo 3.9-11,13 Mt 20.29-34
2 Co 1.7-11

I said: I will confess my fault to the Lord. And you took away my guilt and forgave my sin. **Ps 32**

25 Tue Qo 7.8b-10, 9.7-8
Mt 21.1-11

God has set his seal on us and has put his Spirit in our hearts as a pledge for what is to come. **2 Co 1.12-22**

26 Wed 2 Co 2.14-17
Mt 21.12-17

If you want to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart, be steadfast, and do not take fright in the face of adversity. Hold fast to God and do not leave him. **Si 2.1-6**

27 Thu Si 2.7-11
Mt 21.28-32

God has made us able to serve a new covenant, one which is not of written letters but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. **2 Co 3.1-8**

28 Fri 2 Co 3.16-18
Mt 22.1-10

Deliver the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor and do not be cowardly in acting justly. And you will be like a child of the Most High who will love you more than your own mother does. **Si 4.9-10**

29 Sat Si 14.1-16

Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is similar: Love your neighbour as yourself. **Mt 22.31-40**

30 SUN Dt 6.2-6
Mk 12.28-34

Jesus' power to save those who come to God through him is absolute, because he lives for ever to intercede for them. **Heb 7.23-28**

31 Mon Si 15.11-18
2 Co 4.1-5

Jesus said: The greatest among you will be your servant. **Mt 23.1-4,8-11**

Though the plant that grows from the mustard seed has no precise size, it is not so for its leaven. As soon as it is mixed into the dough, it becomes impossible to set limits to its field of action. The presence of Christ's Spirit may be discreet but it leavens all that it touches to the extent "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15.28).

Where have I seen the humble presence of the kingdom of God — for example in the kindness of the human heart or in an act of reconciliation or sharing — become a space of welcome and community for many?

Instead of passing judgement from outside upon the Church and upon those whom God entrusts to us, how can we be leaven that works within?



Listening to the CONTINENTS

Rumania

Two young women spent Holy Week with believers of the Orthodox Church, one of them writes:

Over the last year and a half the face of Bucarest has changed a lot. The whole city-centre has become a building site. Entire neighbourhoods are being demolished in order to build wide new avenues. At the same time, many people's life has become a struggle for day-to-day survival and some, broken by the suffering, have become rude and aggressive.

Yet, I also saw traditional neighbourhoods that look like a country village, with flowers everywhere and, above all, churches that are places where there is a warm welcome, places of meeting and prayer, places where joy and paschal praise wells up in abundance.

The Orthodox church buildings are small, which means that the church communities themselves remain human and it is possible to know others personally. People know straightaway who needs help in the parish. The church is a meeting-place. Liturgy and life are mingled. These tiny Orthodox churches, wedged in between all the concrete blocks, are quite invisible from the main roads; they looked to me like small private chapels.

Every day, morning and evening, we took part in the Holy Week liturgy in different churches. These two long, daily prayers provided the fundamental rhythm of our week.

On Good Friday, lots of people were already in the church in the morning. The prayer of adoration around the cross took place in a deeply prayerful atmosphere. Through the mountains of flowers at the foot of the cross and the people who approached holding candles and bouquets one could glimpse the passion for a communion in God which lies at the heart of a whole people. Yes indeed,

death has been overcome for ever and a reflection of the Risen Christ already shone through that celebration of Jesus' death.

At three o'clock we returned to the church. The priest welcomed us warmly and invited us to take part in the liturgy. It was the procession to the cross: the priest carried the "epitaph" — a large piece of cloth representing the linen shroud — and a dozen or so children followed with candles and flowers. We were asked to carry big candles decorated with flowers.

We were to represent Mary and the other Mary at the foot of the cross. Many people were weeping during the procession — a sense of compassion for Christ and of sharing in his suffering remains very alive in the people.

We listened to the reading of the Passion and then our two candles were placed before the shroud. Then everyone followed the priest in passing underneath the shroud — a sign of our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. The refrain "Alleluia!" was interwoven throughout the singing.

On Holy Saturday, an atmosphere of celebration began to creep over the entire city. At midnight, all the bells of the city began to ring and believers started streaming towards the churches from all directions, holding lighted candles in their hands. The city belonged to the Christians that night. We got back from church at four o'clock in the morning and stayed up to celebrate in the family.

On the border between Rumania and Hungary, we were able, once more, to see how artificial and porous some of the barriers are. The Rumanian customs officer entered the compartment holding a red, painted Easter egg. On which, a Hungarian woman got another Easter egg out of her bag and held it out to him saying in Rumanian, "Christ is risen!" And, following the tradition, he cracked his egg on hers answering, "He is risen indeed!" ■

Belgium

"About thirty very different groups work together in our parish in Liège. Each year, there is a parish day which helps us to get to know each other.

We were seeking how to create more cohesive relationships between the groups. So, a team was formed whose goal was to get to know the life of each group and to speak about this before the parish. A booklet was produced, containing presentations of the different groups, and was given out to everyone.

Each one of the nine persons in our team now keeps in regular contact with some of the groups and together we prepare activities which allow us to work together in a common creation.

For example, making a Christmas crib with a character representing each group, or giving presents prepared by the children to sick or lonely people. Our team which was chosen by the whole parish without necessarily representing everyone, over the last two years thus assumed a service in the parish: serving unity."

New Zealand

At the end of their stay at Taizé, bishops from New Zealand explained a symbol from their land:

We have been speaking of the need for symbols. The Maori people have a beautiful symbol: "Te ahi ka o te wairua tapu", the rekindled flame of the Holy Spirit, but they just call it "ahi ka", the rekindled flame comes from the fact that the Maori word for a family comes from the flame of the fire in the middle of the house — the means of uniting the family, of preparing food, cooking warmth together. But it has other meanings as well because when the Maori discovered New Zealand, a man called Kupe returned to the far country from which he came, saying, "I will return and bring back people to this new land, but you light a fire and keep it burning — an "ahi ka" — so that I know where to return to. So the "ahi ka" also has the meaning of a guide or goal.

It also relates to the "ahi ka" of the Easter vigil, the paschal candle, the flame that spreads and lights the whole Church. This is one symbol but with many meanings: it is Maori and possibly cannot be exported, but it is something that is very strong for us. It is just one sign of our attempt in our country to find the kind of strong symbol needed.

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